

Our Sunday Readings

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 2:42-47
 PSALM 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24
 I PETER 1:3-9
 JOHN 20:19-31

The Spirit Takes Charge



icon of St. Thomas, apostle

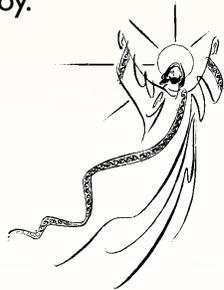
Prayer

adapted from a collection of first century hymns quoted in Days of the Lord, v. 3

Christ Jesus, Risen One,
 As the sun is the joy
 of those who seek the day,
 so our joy is you, our Lord,
 for you are our sun.
 Your rays resurrect us,
 and your light drives all darkness from
 our eyes.

Thanks to you we have acquired eyes
 and seen your holy day;
 we have been given ears
 and heard your truth;
 we have been given knowledge
 and trembled with joy.

We thank you
 and we praise you.
 Amen.



by Duccio di Buoninsegna

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ... For theirs is a community composed of people who, united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, press onward toward the kingdom of their Father. They are bearers of a message of salvation, which is meant for every person.

—Gaudium et Spes, Art. 1
 (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 2:42-47

Reading closely

1. What are the basic elements of the Christian life as St. Luke describes them?
2. Do you see these elements in your life today?
3. How would you describe these first Christians?
4. What might their lives have been like before they became Christians?
5. What challenges might they have faced?
6. Imagine that you live at that time and you're not a Christian. What might draw you to these people?

Applying the word

7. Would visitors to your faith community see the Spirit of God at work?

THE FIRST READING

Hearing from Acts

During the Easter season our first reading is always from the Acts of the Apostles, the second part of St. Luke's two volume work. Acts tells how the Holy Spirit empowered the early church. Jesus' followers continue his mission, which he had prepared them to do during his earthly ministry. We're reminded that Jesus has also shared his Spirit with us so that we can do likewise.

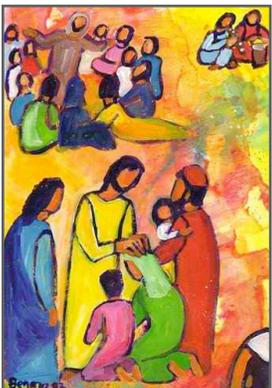
The Spirit spreads

In this passage Luke paints an idealized portrait of the young, new Christian community. Luke isn't pretending that everything was perfect back then. Instead, he's showing how God's Spirit brings about all that we truly want.

Filled with the Spirit, Jesus' followers

- learned about and followed his teaching; some even worked mighty deeds like Jesus had
- lived in fellowship, both spiritually and materially
- shared meals
- prayed

In these ways the early Christians manifested the joy and unity they had in Christ. Their joy wasn't a passing mood but a state of mind and heart: Jesus had been raised from the dead, and they fervently believed that one day soon they would join him. Their joy and the new way they lived won converts to the faith.



THE GOSPEL READING

Peace & reconciliation

The disciples are afraid and withdrawn. Jesus walks through their doors of fear and gives them peace. The great hope of God's people was for *shalom*, a lasting peace that would encompass all creation.

Jesus tells his disciples to walk through the doors of other locked hearts in order to dispel fear and bring peace and reconciliation into the world. One way the Church fulfills this mission is the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Holy Spirit

Before he was killed, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to help the disciples carry out their mission (14:15f). John reminds us that although the earthly Jesus is gone, he remains within and among us in the presence of the Spirit (19:30).



Doubt & faith

Thomas is mostly remembered for not believing that Jesus rose from the dead. What people forget is what he said when Jesus appeared to him: *My Lord and my God!* This is the boldest statement of faith in John's Gospel.

Thomas' words of faith sum up the main theme of this Gospel: Jesus is one with the Father, just as Jesus had been telling people all along. To see Jesus is to see the Father. Those who believe that Jesus is from God receive his Spirit of new and empowering life.

Seeing & believing

The first half of this Gospel is called *The Book of Signs*. Here Jesus does and says things so that people will see that he is the one whom God has sent to give eternal life to all who believe. Verses 30-31 thus sum up the reason John wrote. (John's Gospel ended at 20:31. Someone added an epilogue.)

We haven't seen the earthly Jesus nor the signs he worked. John wrote his Gospel in order to help us see who Jesus is.

Both the words of this Gospel and the Holy Spirit help us to believe that Jesus is *our Lord and our God*.



JOHN 20:19-31

Entering the Word

Imagine that you're one of the disciples.

1. Why are you hiding out?
2. What all are you feeling?
3. What have you been doing since Jesus was crucified?
4. What are you doing right before Jesus appears?
5. What are the other disciples saying and/or doing, if anything?
6. How do you react when Jesus appears?
7. Do Jesus' words of peace surprise you?
8. How do you feel when Jesus shares this Spirit with you?
9. Where is Thomas during all of this?
10. How do you try to convince Thomas of what has happened?
11. Why doesn't Thomas believe you?
12. How does Thomas react when Jesus appears again?
13. How would you compare your reaction to his reaction?
14. Do you think you will ever fear or doubt again?
15. What do you think Jesus and the Father expect of you now?